

MEDIA RELEASE

SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND STAFF IN JUVENILE JUSTICE MUST BE BETTER SUPPORTED

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A report in today's *Sydney Morning Herald* exposing safety incidents in the NSW Juvenile Justice network demonstrates the need for greater resourcing to improve the focus on promoting rehabilitation and safety, the President of the New South Wales Bar Association, Arthur Moses SC, said today.

'A society is judged by how it treats its children. Detaining children should always be a last resort. However, when detention does occur as sometimes it must, we have a duty to ensure these centres are properly resourced so the focus is on rehabilitation, not punitive action, and the safety of both juveniles and staff,' Mr Moses SC said.

'Staff working in Juvenile Justice perform important work in very difficult circumstances and must be supported to do their jobs justly and fairly in a safe environment.

'Children are the most vulnerable group in the Australian community and it is critical that the NSW Government responds swiftly and effectively to address these serious issues. In doing so, we need to be vigilant to ensure that any responses to these matters are handled appropriately so there is no misstep or overreach. We need to learn from the issues experienced by the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in the Northern Territory and be very careful not to repeat these mistakes in the state of NSW.

'We must also be mindful of the fact that a disproportionate number of youth detainees in NSW are Indigenous. Over-representation of Aboriginal children in custody is an unacceptable and serious issue that continues to confront Australia's justice system,' Mr Moses SC said.

Last year, a report by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research into Indigenous imprisonment warned that 'from a longitudinal perspective, the prospects for Indigenous youth in NSW appear particularly grim'. The report cited one study of NSW's Indigenous population born in 1984, which found that by their 23rd birthday, 24.5 per cent had already been placed in a youth detention centre, remanded in custody or given a prison sentence, compared with just 1.3 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.

'The disproportionate rate of Indigenous incarceration continues to contribute to inequality and social injustice. Every child deserves a future and a chance at redemption,' Mr Moses SC said.

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